



International Civil Aviation Organization

MIDANPIRG/17 and RASG-MID/7 Meeting

(Cairo, Egypt, 15 – 18 April 2019)

Agenda Item 4: Coordination between MIDANPIRG and RASG-MID

CALL SIGN CONFUSION MITIGATION

(Presented by U.A.E. and IATA)

SUMMARY

The aim of this paper is to address regional Call Sign Confusion/Similarity as it relates to commercial flights.

Action by the meeting is at paragraph 3.

REFERENCES

- MAEP SC/1 Report
- MIDANPIRG/15 Report
- MAEP Board/2 Report
- RASG-MID/5 Report
- RASG-MID SAFETY ADVISORY – 04
- ICAO State Letter Ref.: AN 6/34-14/332
- ICAO State Letter Ref.: AN 6/34-16/173
- MIDANPIRG/16 Report
- MIDANPIRG/16-WP/34
- ATM S/G 3
- ATM S/G 4

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 : Call-sign similarity can lead to call-sign confusion and ultimately become a causal factor in safety-related events, with potential for hearback/readback errors leading to level busts, runway incursions, as well as general confusion and increased workload for both pilots and controllers. The danger of an aircraft taking and acting on a clearance intended for another aircraft due to call sign confusion is a common occurrence

1.2 At CNS SG/5 Tehran, Iran, 9 – 11 September 2014 it was highlighted that, in order to reduce the level of operational call sign confusion events, and therefore improve levels of safety, several Airline operators have changed their philosophy of only using a numeric (commercial) call-sign (e.g. UAE503) to that of applying an 'alpha-numeric' call sign (e.g. UAE59CG).

1.3 ICAO issued state survey AN 6/34-14/332 tasking States to provide information as it relates to acceptance of alpha numeric Call Signs to include ATC systems and regulatory approvals.

1.4 The MAEP SC/1 meeting held Dubai, UAE (20- 22 January 2015) agreed to a project to recommend possible solutions to the issue for the region.

2. DISCUSSION

2.1 The project was presented to the RASG-MID/4 Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, 30 March – 1 April 2015.

2.2 The UAE presented during the MIDANPIRG/16 the initiative they had taken to address Call Sign Similarity Mitigation. The GCAA established its UAE National Airspace Advisory Committee (NASAC) Working Group on “Call Sign Similarity” in 2014 to manage and mitigate this challenge and continues to work on and promote the use of alpha numerical call signs.

2.3 The UAE through its NASAC WG ‘Call Sign Similarity’ work published the U.A.E. AIC A01/2015 ‘CALL SIGN SIMILARITY’ that includes recommendations, guidelines and best courses of action in order to minimise the occurrence of Call sign confusion among all stakeholders involved.

2.4 In February 2019, the MID Region Contingency Coordination team (CCT) was activated due to the airspace disruptions involving the closure and/or the heavily restricted use of the Pakistani and Afghanistan FIR. During this contingency operation the MID Region specifically Muscat, Emirates and Bahrain ACCs experienced a dramatic increase of additional traffic in their FIRs and ATC were confronted with a much higher rate of call sign similarities due to this traffic increase.

2.5 The Pakistan CCT activation reinforced the need for formal cross regional Alpha Numeric Call Signs (ANCS) initiative and regions such as AFI and ASPAC should be encouraged to push for implementation of the ANCS and assure harmonization of processes as was done between the MID and Europe.

2.6 The meeting may wish to note that just the U.A.E. registered Airlines alone contribute over 500 scheduled flights operating with an alpha-numeric ATC Call Sign on a daily basis



2.7 Eurocontrol created the Call-Sign Similarity (CSS) Service in 2012 and created software that runs the schedule of the participating airlines against each other and through an evolving algorithm predicts similarities and suggests fixes to airlines. This software service has been provided as well by the IATA MENA office for airlines that would need such support for schedule and regional deconfliction.

In the area of Eurocontrol a decrease of 80% of the CSS incidents has been noticed since 2012.

2.8 Challenges in the ICAO Regions continue to restrict airlines utilising ANCS. The main challenge identified in most regions is the reluctance of airports and States to accept ANCS. For example, the ICAO MID region continues to have some aerodromes rejecting the use of ANCS for arriving and departing flights despite reports from ATC and/or airlines of call sign confusion. The denial of landing or departure flight plans with alpha numeric call signs results in the flight having to remain on the commercial call sign for the entire flight which may contribute to incidents of call sign confusion in enroute FIRs of the aircraft flight plan.

2.9 ICAO issued state letter Ref: AN 6/34-16/173 dated June 2016, requesting states to implement MIDANPIRG Conclusion 15/2 and report call sign Similarity cases.

2.10 Reporting of call sign Similarity/confusion continues to be a challenge in the region. ICAO and IATA have established dedicated email accounts for States and operators to report occurrences that would enable the ability to address the operators of reported ATC call sign confusion in order to provide a mitigation measure. Currently only one State reports such occurrences to either ICAO or IATA.

2.11 The U.A.E. NASAC WG has identified and is currently working on the following topics:

- The requirement for setting up unified procedures of tactical call sign deconfliction between two adjacent ATC sectors;
- The ability that an operating Crew can initiate the request for a tactical call sign change;
- Collecting requirements to a future ATM system, that must have a ‘built-in’ detection/alerting tool and the identification of call sign conflicts before they happen;
- The requirement to easily record and report call-sign similarities and to address them immediately with the affected Airline Operators;
- Supporting the tactical use of combining numbers of the Call Sign to mitigate a call sign similarity (e.g. ABC seven-twenty instead of ABC seven-two-zero)

3. ACTION BY THE MEETING

3.1 The meeting is invited to:

- a) support the CSC initiatives ensuring effective national implementation and cooperation;
- b) encourage other regions to implement the use of alpha numeric call signs for ATC use
- c) discuss resolution of airport reluctance to accept ANCS to identify ways to overcome this issue
- d) take note of and support the work of the UAE
- e) encourage the set-up of a national ‘Call Sign Similarity Working Group’
- f) report call sign similarity to the following email addresses: MIDCSC@icao.int and MENACSSU@iata.org